

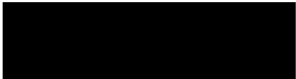
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MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable Kenneth Rush

DEP SEC. HAS SEEN

Attached is the memorandum on the  
cease fire question which Dr. Kissinger  
requested on 26 April. Copies are being  
sent to you and the other WSAG principals.

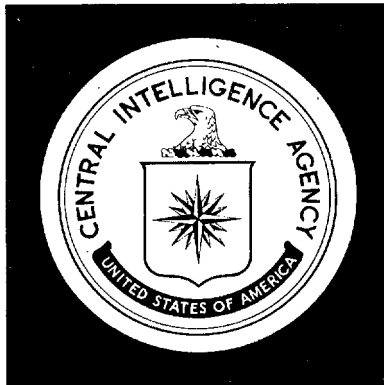
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for Richard Helms

26 April 1972  
(DATE)

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# Memorandum

*Likelihood and Consequences of a Sudden  
Vietnamese Communist Cease Fire Offer*

~~Secret~~

CIA No. 7000  
April 1972

Copy No. 3

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27 April 1972

## MEMORANDUM

### Likelihood and Consequences of a Sudden Vietnamese Communist Cease Fire Offer

#### I. THE PROBLEM

1. This memorandum addresses itself to two questions:  
(1) The likelihood of the Vietnamese Communists' making a cease fire offer at some point in the near future and (2) if the Communists should make such an offer, whether or not it would be to the allies' net advantage to accept.

2. Technically, of course, the Communists already have cease fire proposals on the table. The PRG's seven point proposal of 1 July 1971 makes reference to cease fire in its discussion of point 1 ("Regarding the deadline for the total withdrawal of U.S. forces")\* and its discussion of point 2 ("Regarding the question of power in South Vietnam").\*\* The nine point North Vietnamese proposal made in a private meeting on 26 July 1971 and announced publicly on 31 January 1972 has as its seventh point that "All the parties should achieve a cease fire after the signing of the agreements on the above mentioned problems." These extant offers, however, are directed principally at a cease fire between Communist and U.S. forces (not

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\*A cease-fire will be observed between the South Viet Nam People's Liberation Armed Forces and the Armed Forces of the United States and of the other foreign countries in the U.S. camp as soon as the parties reach agreement on the withdrawal from South Vietnam of the totality of U.S. forces and those of the other foreign countries in the U.S. camp.

\*\*A cease-fire will be observed between the South Viet Nam People's Liberation Armed Forces and the armed forces of the Saigon administration as soon as a government of national concord is established.

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GVN forces), they are keyed to Communist-U.S. hostilities in Vietnam (not hostilities in Laos or Cambodia), they are part of a sequential scenario in which cease fire comes after political agreements are reached (not before) and, above all, these cease fire offers are components of a politico-military package deal.

3. Given the above, what we are really talking about in this memorandum is the likelihood, and consequences, of the Communists making a new cease fire proposal that differs from their extant proposals in one or more of the following material respects: an offer extended to cover all of Indochina, broadened to encompass GVN forces (or other local friendly forces) as well as U.S. forces, or an offer to some degree uncoupled, at least with respect to temporal sequence, from the other component parts of Hanoi's political package -- i.e., some form of proposal to stop shooting and talk without waiting for final agreement on everything else before hostilities are suspended.

## II. RELEVANT BACKGROUND

4. In assessing the likelihood of Hanoi's making a new cease fire proposal of the type just outlined, two historical considerations are relevant. First, the current Lao Dong leadership has remained essentially unchanged since the end of World War II -- Ho Chi Minh and Nguyen Chi Thanh are now dead, but no new members have been named to the Politburo since the Franco-Viet Minh war. This Politburo leadership is notably averse to taking political gambles. It played around with cease fire concepts in early 1954 before Geneva and in buying the 1954 Geneva settlement gambled once when the odds appeared (at the time) to be almost sure fire. But despite these almost guaranteed odds, that gamble failed, and the one on whose shoulders the burden of coping with that failure fell most heavily was Le Duan, now the Party's First Secretary and the most senior man at the Politburo table. The whole history and pattern of Vietnamese Communist policy in the current struggle underlines the Politburo's aversion to taking major political risks. At almost any point between 1965 and 1968, Hanoi could have struck a negotiated settlement that would have gotten the U.S. basically out of the struggle and left the Communists in an essentially political contest with disorganized and divided non-Communist

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elements which the Communists would have had an excellent chance of winning. But success would not have been assured or virtually guaranteed in advance by the U.S. and Hanoi was manifestly unwilling to run even the slightest degree of political risk. The once bitten Politburo, in short, is very shy indeed where gambling is concerned.

5. The second consideration is really an operative form of the first. Hanoi's whole negotiating posture is built around a core package to which all other issues -- cease fire, prisoner exchange, etc. -- are peripheral. This core includes the deposition of Thieu (and concomitant dismantling of the GVN) and the total cessation of U.S. support to Hanoi's non-Communist Vietnamese opponents. Hanoi has made its pitch in a protean plethora of formulations -- ten points, four points, seven points, nine points, two points -- but the core (to date) has never changed.

6. In addition to its past behavior over the years, the current propaganda line of the Vietnamese Communist leadership is also germane. The cadre within the movement, plus the world at large, have been told that the current "Nguyen Hue" campaign will be decisive. Some leadership echelons have climbed further (or more incautiously) out on limbs than others over the question of whether this is the "final" battle, but Hanoi's whole internal command and external propaganda pitch has laid stress on the importance of the current round of fighting. The faithful within the movement and its followers in Indochina and around the world (including the U.S.) have been promised a major victory. Furthermore, it has been impossible for Hanoi to disguise the extent to which its available military assets have been invested in this campaign. Thus unless the campaign produces positive results sufficient to be plausibly touted as constituting a net "victory" of major proportions, Hanoi's leaders will suffer a great loss of face that could have major and (for these leaders) decidedly unpleasant political repercussions. The laboring Communist mountains, in short, have to produce something far more impressive than a ridiculous mouse.

7. In light of the above, the actual battlefield situation in South Vietnam becomes very germane to the questions here considered.

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There has been heavy fighting for a month and at least equally heavy fighting is clearly in prospect over the weeks ahead. Some ARVN units -- notably the 3rd, 5th and 22nd Divisions -- have not exactly distinguished themselves in combat. Communist forces have taken some territory (most of it sparsely populated or virtually uninhabited), pacification has been set back somewhat in lower MR 1 and upper MR 2, there has been noise in the Delta along with a few genuine problems (posed, however, almost exclusively by NVA units), but overall a month of fighting has not yet given Hanoi any tangible gains of toutable political significance. At this writing, Dong Ha has not fallen, let alone Quang Tri. Hue is not yet even seriously threatened. Kontum is iffy, but it has not fallen yet. Highway 19 was temporarily blocked but at this writing has been at least temporarily reopened. An Loc is still holding, despite the Communists' imprudent and increasingly embarrassing public claim of early victory there. There is not yet much nourishment for Hanoi's cause in the Delta and Saigon, so far, is relatively calm. This overall picture could change dramatically in the weeks, or even days, ahead -- but so far, even the most agile of Hanoi's propagandists would be hard pressed to manufacture a supportable claim of major net victory.

### III. THE ASSESSMENT

8. So long as the battlefield picture retains its current general configuration, a new or revised Communist cease fire proposal has to be rated as unlikely. Hanoi may try some variations on its already publicly enunciated themes. When Le Duc Tho returns to Paris, for example, he might repackage the Communist position and move cease fire up to point one. But an uncoupled call for cease fire not closely tied to political preconditions is not likely to be made until the battlefield picture changes. A Hanoi call for a cease fire at the present moment could be read -- and could readily be exploited by both Saigon and Washington -- as tantamount to a Communist admission of defeat. This is something Hanoi unquestionably recognizes. Given the Vietnamese Communists' acute sensitivity to face and the political import of "image," virtually the only thing that could plausibly induce Hanoi to call for an uncoupled cease fire now would be a painful, private decision that Communist military forces in Indochina were on the verge of publicly undisguisable collapse.

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9. If the above reasoning is correct, should Hanoi call for a cease fire without there being any material change in the present battlefield situation, the allies could justifiably conclude that Hanoi was on the verge of collapse and play their hands accordingly.

10. The situation would be quite different, of course, if the tide of battle should appear to be turning -- even temporarily -- in Hanoi's favor. If, for example, elements of the ARVN Rangers, Airborne, First Division and/or the GVN Marines were publicly routed, Quang Tri had fallen along with, say, Kontum, An Loc, and Vi Thanh, and Saigon was being harassed by fire, you would have a different calculus of probabilities on the cease fire question. Doubly so if the Communists were battling inside Hue, and even more so if they had even temporarily captured it. In this kind of situation, a new cease fire pitch at Paris would be quite likely.

11. Any such pitch made in circumstances resembling those just postulated, however, would be keyed to U.S. Congressional and public opinion. Hanoi's offer, for example, would probably embody some variant of a proposed exchange of U.S. prisoners in return for a cessation of U.S. military activity -- i. e., air and naval action. Hanoi's object would be twofold: build unignorable domestic political pressures on President Nixon and drive a sharp wedge between Washington and Saigon, depressing if not collapsing the GVN's morale in the process.

12. U.S. acceptance of this type of cease fire offer under such a set of assumed circumstances would clearly not produce any net advantage for allied prospects. Quite the reverse. In fact (and this too would probably be Hanoi's calculation) if the U.S. even seemed to be nibbling on such an offer in such a situation, Saigon's will and morale would be seriously if not fatally depressed.

13. The two alternative scenarios sketched above are, in a sense, extremes. The actual course of the struggle over the next month or so will probably be more ambiguous in appearance than either -- Kontum might fall, for example, along with Quang Tri and Vi Thanh, but not Hue or An Loc. The permutable possibilities here are almost literally infinite and the judgments on the likelihood of a Communist cease fire offer correspondingly complex. The more the actual situation resembles the first hypothetical situation (status quo or better), the greater the likelihood that a cease fire call would be

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at least a tacit admission of major Communist political problems. The more the actual situation resembles our worse case model, the greater becomes the likelihood of a political gambit cease fire call timed and tailored to support temporary Communist battlefield success.

14. In sum, cease fire is a card Hanoi could well opt to play at some point in the current hand, but whether its play would work to Communist or allied advantage is a question critically influenced by timing and the actual course of battlefield events in Indochina. Also, whenever and however Hanoi opts to table (or re-table) cease fire, it is most unlikely to do so in an uncoupled call. The style of play would probably be designed to divert attention from the accompanying fine print, but unless Hanoi should think itself on the verge of defeat, the fine print would still be there. Also, the object of playing this card would be to take the U.S. out of the game and, in the process, deal a mortal blow to the GVN's morale, capability and will to play on alone.

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